

Policy & Programmes

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Dear Movement and Place Team,

Thank you for inviting responses on the Science Vale Movement and Place Plan consultation materials, comprising an Introduction, the Science Vale Movement and Place Plan, a Summary Science Vale Movement and Place Plan, Delivery Plan, People Postcards, Proposals Map and an Actions and Objectives summary.

The aim of the Science Vale Movement and Place Plan (herein referred to as MAP Plan) is to update Oxfordshire County Council's Science Vale Area Strategy which formed part of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) 4. The LTP4 has now been superseded by the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP), with MAP Plans forming Part 2 of the refresh and helping to deliver LTCP aspirations. The Science Vale MAP Plan forms part of a range of MAP Plans that will cover the entirety of Oxfordshire, with other areas in Vale of White Horse labelled: 'Western Vale' and 'Abingdon and Eastern Vale', as well as part of 'Central Oxfordshire'.

The MAP Plans seek to reflect the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve, providing a range of objectives, and associated actions to achieve them, over the next 25 years. The objectives align closely to the LTCP vision and targets, notably: vision zero (no deaths or serious injuries on Oxfordshire roads) and applying a people first approach to planning.

The Science Vale MAP Plan seeks to achieve 22 objectives, with themes such as: place shaping, developing transport choice, and improving transport interchange.

Vale of White Horse District Council supports the Science Vale MAP Plan. We particularly welcome the acknowledgement of the diverse area for which the Plan covers, with large areas of rural land, coupled with some of the highest density settlements in the district. Accordingly, the MAP Plan emphasises the need to ensure that strategies are suitable for the locations where they are to be implemented, i.e. where there is a realistic prospect of altering travel habits.

We also strongly support the objectives to improve and expand the range, frequency and quality of public transport services and infrastructure in the area, as well as infrastructure for active travel. There is a strong emphasis on creating places for people, protecting the environment, and promoting active and sustainable travel, which is also welcomed.

The Science Vale MAP Plan proposals support our [Vale of White Horse Council Plan](#) through promotion of sustainable travel for “climate and nature recovery”, the proposed schemes help to promote “healthy, sustainable, and inclusive communities” and identify “infrastructure [that] people need”. Enabling sustainable travel through new and improved infrastructure supports our [Nature and Climate Action Plan](#) target, which is to be a carbon neutral district by 2045.

The Science Vale MAP Plan proposals also align with our existing and emerging Local Plan policies which seek to promote the use of sustainable travel, including [Core Policy 33: Promoting Sustainable Transport and Accessibility](#) and [Core Policy 35: Promoting Public Transport, Cycling and Walking](#) (Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1) and [Policy IN2 – Sustainable transport and accessibility](#) and [Policy IN3 Transport Infrastructure and safeguarding](#) (emerging South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan 2041).

While we support these potential improvements to travel and place making in our district, we have the following comments regarding the content of the consultation. Below we have set out some suggested improvements and considerations.

Comments on the Introduction

We recommend the use of image titles for all images in the document and note a disparity between the web-based version and PDF version. For information it would be helpful to set out what is being shown in the contextual images such as "Image 2: Country lane in [insert village]".

Please change the "National Byway Network" to Public Rights of Way (PROW) network (page 5 and glossary). The PROW network comprises a range of classifications including two types of Byways, as follows: Footpaths, Bridleways, Restricted Byways, and Byways Open To All Traffic. All are available for walking, while some are limited for specified modes. For example, Footways do not permit cycling, while the other three categories do permit cycling.

Recreational Routes are created by local authorities, Government agencies or volunteer organisations and are identified on Ordinance Survey (OS) Maps with a string of diamond shapes. National Trails are depicted the same way on OS maps but with a green acorn marked next to the name (such as Thames Path (acorn)). The Recreational Routes in Oxfordshire have, in part, been listed in the document. Please review the list to ensure all Recreational Routes are accounted for. Those for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse are as follows overleaf:

- The Chiltern Way
- D'Arcy Dalton Way
- Oxford Green Belt Way
- Oxfordshire Way
- Shakespeare's Way
- Swan's Way
- Vale Way

Page 5 sets out the county's strategic road network as follows: *"In terms of the highway network, the county relies on the strategic road network, primarily the A34, which carries up to 74,000 vehicles per day and the M40 (London/ M25 to Birmingham/ M6/ M42), which carries up to 90,000 vehicles per day".* We would like to suggest the following amendments: *"In terms of the highway network, the county relies on the strategic road network, primarily the M40 (extending between London and Birmingham), which carries up to 90,000 vehicles per day and the A34 (extending between Winchester and Bicester), which carries up to 74,000 vehicles per day."*

Comments on the Science Vale MAP Plan

The maps included in the MAP Plan should show the National Landscape and Green Belt boundaries, as these are two major designations that may affect delivery of the Plan, so should be identified. There is no mention of the Oxford Green Belt and only three references to National Landscape (the latter mostly in the context of flooding and biodiversity rather than health or recreational potential).

The 'Area context' on page 4 identifies a range of towns that Science Vale covers, please ensure each location is set out in full, i.e. East Hendred and West Hendred and that the report refers to Abingdon-on-Thames in each instance (all documents). The aerial view of Harwell Campus is very old and should be updated to reflect recent developments there.

We have drafted further detail (see underlined text) regarding the Wilts & Berks Canal to be added to page 5, as follows: *"The Wilts & Berks Canal is a further feature in Science Vale, which is sought to be re-established as a navigable waterway and walking, wheeling, and cycling route along its entire length between Melksham, Wiltshire for the Kennet and Avon Canal and Abingdon-on-Thames for the River Thames."*

Additionally on page 5, the jobs figures should be updated to 2025 data.

Regarding employment on page 8, we would suggest adding the following detail:

"South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are preparing a Joint Local Plan (JLP) to guide future housing and employment growth across the two districts. The plan will set out what types of development are needed and where they should be located, providing a framework for planning decisions. The JLP has an up-to-date evidence base,

both the JLP and its evidence base have informed the Science Vale Movement and Place Plan.

Within Science Vale, the JLP identifies significant employment land allocations. These are complemented by adopted Local Development Orders (LDOs) for Didcot Technology Park and Milton Park, as well as two Enterprise Zones covering Harwell Campus, Milton Interchange, and Didcot Quarter.

Together, these allocations and designations provide around 200 hectares of employment land in Science Vale, supporting economic growth and innovation in the area through to 2041."

Page 10 states that the population density in Science Vale is 2,234 people per square kilometre. It goes on to state that this is significantly lower than the population densities of Oxford, Bicester, and Banbury and identifies that transporting people from homes to their place of employment is one of the biggest challenges in the area. Although the point raised is true, that Science Vale is sparse in locations, identifying single settlements in comparison is not the most fair comparison.

Page 12 states that: *"many commuters live in the area or close to the area where they work. 48% of commuting trips are internalised within Didcot. Census data also illustrates a similar pattern in Wantage and Grove (51%), and at Harwell Campus and Milton Park."* however it is unclear how 2 employment sites (Harwell Campus and Milton Park) can generate high trip internalisation, when there are limited dwellings located within them.

The "MAPF" is identified in the Science Vale MAP Plan on page 22, please confirm how this relates to the MAP Plan and what it stands for.

Objective SV1 seeks to improve public realm areas for settlement centres. The single action identified to achieve this objective is to investigate options to improve the public realm. A second action could be added, which could be to "support the delivery of improved public realm, walking, wheeling, cycling, and public transport identified in Action 1.1", as seen in Action 5.1 and 5.2.

The supporting text for Objective SV2 suggests that more types of leisure opportunities should be provided within Didcot and Wantage to create a sense of togetherness, place, inclusiveness, and community, mentioning ten pin bowling, mini golf and league football. However, promotion of travel via public transport for longer leisure journeys outside of Science Vale can also promote social cohesion, as residents living in a similar area could share the same public transport services to and from the destination. This then also reduces the need to implement large and expensive infrastructure in more locations. Vale of White Horse District Council produced a [Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy](#) which assess the leisure and playing pitch needs across our district, and considers how specialist facilities in one settlement address the needs of a wider area.

Action 2.7 for the second objective includes investigating opportunities 'to develop the 'Oxfordshire Way' and Community Hubs. These two items don't fit well in the same action, perhaps the 'community hub' element can be added to action 2.8 which already considers

community hubs. While promotion of all national trails and recreational routes in Science Vale could be added into action 2.7 i.e. Thames Path, The Ridgeway, Oxford Green Belt Way, and Vale Way.

Action SV2 2.11 seeks to ensure protection of the area's historic character, but does not set out how it is to be achieved, therefore it is an aim not an action. We welcome and support the commitment to do this, which will be relevant for transport projects where transport infrastructure is itself a heritage asset (e.g. railway heritage, canal heritage, the historic Ridgeway path) or where new transport projects could impact on conservation areas, listed buildings, historic monuments, archaeology etc.

Objective SV5 seeks to improve walking, wheeling and cycling opportunities along greenways and waterways. Action 5.3 considers working with partners to improve wayfinding. Please add Wilts & Berks Canal Trust and Wiltshire, Swindon & Oxfordshire Canal Partnership to the lists of key stakeholders for this action.

We are interested to hear more about and be involved in any work relating to Action 8.4 which seeks to *"Develop a cycle parking map showing capacity and levels of use at cycle parking, hubs, and hangars"* (underlined text is our emphasis). We suggest adding cycle hangars to the glossary.

We would like to see a Harwell Campus cycle hub as an example for Objective 8, this example is mentioned further on in the document, but is important for this objective.

We would like to see suitable crossing facilities added to the list of bus infrastructure elements to be reviewed and improved as part of Objective SV11 Action 2.

Page 43 sets out the supporting text for Objectives SV12 and 13 for rail, but does not mention the opening of Wantage and Grove station. Although mentioned elsewhere in the report, this is an important element of rail improvements for the area (as set out in the Actions) and should be included in this section. Furthermore, the Figure SV1: Map of Science Vale could be amended to illustrate the future station.

Objective SV19 considers the safeguarding of land for future transport schemes. We are a little concerned by the inclusion of 'depot' in both the supporting text and Action 19.4. It is unclear what sort of depot is being considered here. Depots generate thoughts of large parking areas for buses or other large waiting vehicles for operational requirements; these would not be preferable for the Science Vale area unless deemed a requirement. Any forthcoming depot will need to be assessed with regard to potential impacts to the road network and provide suitable mitigation where necessary.

A 'zonal network' for parcel deliveries in Didcot is identified in Objective 20 (Action 3 and Action 4), it would be helpful to understand a little more about this measure to understand how it could benefit or impact our local residents and businesses.

Little is said in the MAP Plan about drones as a delivery mechanism, the UK's first drone superhighway project, or vertiports (as at Bicester Motion). In an area of innovation like

Science Vale (recognised in SV22) where there could be an opportunity for some privately funded projects and trials, this seems an omission.

As mentioned previously the objectives of the Science Vale MAP Plan align closely to the LTCP vision and targets. However, the LTCP Policy 17 – Equestrians does not appear to be well captured in the MAP Plan. Policy 17 seeks to ensure the needs of equestrian users is considered in road and highway strategy making, as well as OCC operations. The MAP Plan defines Non-Motorised Users (NMU) as including horse riders in the Glossary. The term NMU is used in one objective and an action in the MAP Plan, but the body of the document doesn't explicitly mention horse riders. We suggest additional detail is added to the MAP Plan to support equestrians, particularly in light of the rural nature of the area.

Summary

We welcome the ambitions of the MAP Plan for Science Vale particularly as they may help address the transport constraints in the area while considering the climate emergency we are facing. The schemes relevant to our District are welcomed.

Yours sincerely



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